

Posted by u/meowcats734 6 hours ago 🐱

[PI] You can detect lies easily, but no one knows about your ability. Today, your best friend lied about being human.

OC PI

Bargain Bin Superheroes

(Arc 2, Part 3: Tupperman v.s. Connor Elman)

(Note: Bargain Bin Superheroes is episodic; each part is self-contained. This story can be enjoyed without reading the previous sections.)

Empathy is a strange power. Almost all people have it, in one way or another; I simply have a little more of the stuff than most. In that respect, I sometimes wonder if my so-called superpower is even useful at all.

Because you didn't need superpowers to tell something was wrong with my best friend.

I walked back home, mind still buzzing with the business of the day, when I smelled alcohol on the air—the sweet and cloying kind, not the sharp and antiseptic kind. As a politician and an ex-superhero, I knew the difference—and as Tupperman's best friend, I knew what the former meant.

I fumbled the door open and burst into my home.

Tupperman was demurely sitting on the couch, morosely staring at a Tupperware container sloshing with wine.

A half-dozen emotions whirled through me in an instant. Anger. He was supposed to be watching my daughter. Panic. If he lost control, Tupperman could easily kill everyone in this house. Self-loathing. Tupperman was my friend; he would never hurt me, and it was an insult to our friendship to think that he could.

Fear.

Tupperman might not be able to hurt me, but he had fewer such compunctions when it came to himself.

Determination.

Tupperman had protected me from assassins and villains; I could help him fight his inner demons, too.

"Hey," I said, carefully sitting next to him. I put one hand on his shoulder, igniting the empathic link, and suddenly I wanted to claw at my flesh and tear myself apart because I was wrong and I was a cancer and I needed to be excised from the world and—

My hand jolted back of its own accord, as if I'd touched a hot stove. Tupperman snorted.

"So. That's how much it sucks being me, huh? You can't even handle *empathizing* with me for half a second." Tupperman downed the Tupperware container of wine, spilling it over his shirt—the boxy little thing was never meant to be drank from. He tossed the empty Tupperware box aside, materialized a new one in his hand, and refilled it from a dark, unlabeled bottle. "I—I mean, I knew that already. *I can hardly stand being me all the time, and I deserve it.*"

I wanted to punch myself for reflexively jerking back, but I took that emotion and quelled it. The empathic link went both ways; he would feel it if I was filled with hatred and disgust. Gently, I placed my hand on his, and I didn't deserve to be helped or touched because I was selfish, I was a monster, I was a wolf, I was useless before and I was *even more useless now...*

I let Tupperman's self-loathing and hatred flow from him into me, wordlessly meeting his eyes for a liquid, slow moment.

Then I said, "Connor—"

"Don't call me that," Tupperman snapped. "That's a human name. A name for someone who deserves to be a *person*. I'm not a person. I'm a supervillain. I'm evil. I'm the bad guy."

"You're human," I whispered. "You're one of the best humans I know. Please, Connor, it scares me to see you like this."

Immediately, I knew I'd made a mistake. Bitter laughter spilled from Tupperman's lips even as I felt his thoughts roiling and twisting: *See? Showing her your self-hatred just hurt her too, hurt her in ways she doesn't deserve, and because you hurt her, you deserve this. You should've kept this hidden. You should've stayed away from her. You destroy whatever you touch.*

Suddenly, Tupperman straightened up. He flicked my hand away, brushed a few unidentifiable crumbs off his shirt, and slapped a saccharine grin on his face. "Well, gosh golly, Clara, that makes it all better. You're right. You win. I'm human. I deserve happiness. You've convinced me. Now leave me alone."

I didn't have to have superpowers to know that he was lying. I laid my hand back on his and shook my head. "I'm not going anywhere, Connor. You *are* human, and you're *not* evil."

And suddenly, I was flying backwards in a plastic cage. The world whirled around me as I slammed into the wall and couldn't hold back a cry of pain. "IS THAT RIGHT?" Tupperman thundered. Dazed, I tried to push my way out of the human-sized Tupperware

box he'd materialized; as soon as I popped the lid open and tried to clamber out, however, the old box dematerialized, and a slightly smaller box materialized around me. "IS THIS SOMETHING A REAL HUMAN WOULD DO? OR IS THIS THE WORK OF A MONSTER? A SUPERVILLAIN? A—A *CARICATURE*?" Every time I tried to move, every time it seemed like I would claw my way out of Tupperman's prison, a slightly smaller, slightly more choking box materialized around me. I tripped and fell to my knees, and when I tried to get back up, unyielding plastic stood in my way. I looked up, heart pounding, to see tears streaming down Tupperman's face.

I swallowed heavily. Without my empathy, there was no way to know for sure whether what I was about to say would be right. I could doom both him and myself with a word.

But even with all the superpowers in the world, that still would've been true. I didn't need a magical guarantee that he wouldn't hurt me when I had the strongest such guarantee in existence already.

Tupperman was my friend.

And I believed in him.

"If I'm a good person," he finally said, "then why am I hurting you right now?"

I looked up and said, quietly, "Because you're in pain, Connor. And because there is nothing more human than sharing your pain with others." I stood up and stepped out of my box; this time, Connor didn't stop me. "Let me share your pain." I held out my arms, but I didn't move any further.

He'd have to take this step himself.

And he did. All at once, he surged forward, my powers connecting our emotions wherever we touched, and I *hated* myself, but I *loved* myself, and I was so scared of being worthless, and I was reassuring myself that just by being me I was precious and valuable, and I felt like I was trapped in a deep, cold chasm, and I was sitting beside myself, holding myself to keep me warm.

Empathy is a strange power.

But all of us have it, in some form or another.

When the torrent of a thousand thoughts slowed to a crawl, Tupperman finally said, "...Time was, the things you fought were... people. Supervillains that shot fire or breathed ice. Things I could protect you from. I could stand between you and the bad guys. But now... now that you're a Mayor... you're playing a game of politics with faceless masses and government institutions and I can't protect you from that." He held me as if he'd never let go. "And I'm scared. I'm so, so scared."

I took a step back; reluctantly, Tupperman relinquished his grasp on me. "Connor. You don't have to protect me to be a good person."

He clenched his fists. "I know that. But it's what heroes do, and—"

"You don't have to be a *hero* to be a good person, either."

He started trembling. "Then—then—"

"You just have to be my friend."

Tupperman closed his eyes.

Then Connor Elman, the kid who made sarcastic jokes every day since we'd met in middle school, the man who'd watched over my daughter and stayed by my side through government assassins and political maneuvers, opened his eyes.

And he smiled through the tears.

A.N.

I'm trying something new! "Bargain Bin Superheroes" will be an episodic story where each part is inspired by a writing prompt that catches my eye. Check out [this post](#) for the rest of the story, and subscribe to [r/bubblewriters](#) for more. As always, I had fun writing this, and I hope you have a good day.